

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O 301025Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2509

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0325

EXDIS

STATE PASS AID FOR NOOTER

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, SY

SUBJECT: SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

1. SUMMARY: PLANNING FOR PROGRAM OF 100 POST-GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR SYRIAN STUDENTS HAS COME UNSTUCK. FONMIN OBJECTS TO ABU DHABI FINANCIAL PARTICIPATION IN WHAT HE HAD UNDERSTOOD WOULD BE "PURELY USG GRANT." HE STATED SARG HAS DECIDED DECLINE SCHOLARSHIPS DESPITE EXPLANATIONS. END SUMMARY

2. FONMIN KHADDAM SUMMONED ME JANUARY 29 TO ADVISE THAT SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO DECLINE USG OFFER OF 100 SCHOLARSHIPS. REASON GIVEN IS THAT SYRIAN AMBASSADOR IN ABU DHABI HAD INFORMED DAMASCUS, BASED ON CONTACT WITH A "LOW LEVEL OFFICIAL" OF UAE FOREIGN MINISTRY, THAT ABU DHABI WOULD BE PAYING FOR 50 OF THESE SCHOLARSHIPS. SYRIAN DECISION TO DECLINE HAD BEEN TAKEN WITH NO INTENT TO DAMAGE DEVELOPING BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND DAMASCUS.

3. I SAID THAT FONMIN HAD RECEIVED ERRONEOUS INFORMATION. RECALLED I HAD COME TO HIM LATE DECEMBER TO ADVISE THAT AID BILL HAD PASSED THROUGH BOTH HOUSES AND THAT, UNDER CONTINUING RESOLUTION AUTHORITY, ONCE FINAL

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CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL GIVEN THAT USG WOULD PROVIDE

APPROXIMATELY ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR 100 POST-GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS. STATED WE OVER PAST MONTHS HAD INDEED DISCUSSED WITH ABU DHABI AUTHORITIES POSSIBLE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IN SYRIA WHICH UAE AUTHORITIES HAD TOLD US THEY WRE KEENLY INTERESTED IN ASSISTING. THIS QUESTION HAD INITIALLY BEEN DISCUSSED LAST SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER WHEN USG FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR SYRIA FOR SCHOLARSHIPS WERE LIMITED TO HANDFUL UNDER THE DEPARTMENT'S SMALL CULTURAL EXCHANGE BUDGET. ABU DHABI HAD SUGGESTED ITS MATCHING USG FUNDS AND DISCUSSIONS HAD BEEN PURSUED INTERMITTENTLY DURING THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. I HAD PERSONALLY ENCOURAGED THESE DISCUSSIONS AND MY COLLEAGUE IN ABU DHABI HAD PURSUED THEM ENERGETICALLY BECAUSE OF OUR INTEREST IN PROMOTING AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE THE NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA CREATED BY LAST YEAR'S REESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. HOWEVER, THE 100 SCHOLARSHIPS I HAD TALKED TO HIM ABOUT IN LATE DECEMBER WERE TO BE 100 PERCENT US FUNDED. ANY FUNDS UAEG MIGHT EVENTUALLY PROVIDE WOULD THUS BE FOR SCHOLARSHIPS IN EXCESS OF 100.

4. IN REPLY FONMIN REFERRED TO SYRIAN PRIDE AND FACT THAT SYRIA COULD HAVE FOUND THE MILLION DOLLARS NEEDED FROM MANY SOURCES. WARMING IN CHARACTERISTIC FASHION TO THE ATTACK KHADDAM SAID SYRIA WOULD NOT IMPOSE ON US TREASURY GIVEN AMERICA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS WHICH OUR AID FOR ISRAEL HAD CREATED. I AGREED THE DOLLAR AMOUNT WAS NOT THE IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR EITHER OF US; IT WAS A SYMBOL OF OUR INTENT TO LAUNCH OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP. RECALLED THAT SCHOLARSHIPS HAD BEEN AT THE TOP OF EVERY SYRIAN OFFICIAL'S WANT LIST SINCE MY INITIAL CONTACTS WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER HIMSELF IN SEPTEMBER. SAID WOULD BE A SHAME IF THE PROGRAM WE HAD SUCCEEDED IN WORKING OUT ENTIRELY WITH US FINANCING COULD NOT NOW BE REALIZED. I ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY MISUNDERSTANDING, IN THAT I HAD NOT ASKED THAT OUR AMBASSADOR'S CONTACTS IN ABU DHABI WITH UAE LEADERSHIP ON THIS QUESTION BE SUSPENDED AS SOON AS WE HAD A REASONABLE PROSPECT OF SECURING USG FINANCES. HOWEVER, REMINDED FONMIN THAT UNDER OUR COMMITMENT TO CONGRESS PROPOSAL FOR PROVIDING SCHOLARSHIPS HAD TO BE SUBMITTED FOR THIRTY DAY CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW AND THIS HAD BEEN DONE ONLY ON JANUARY 24. ADDED THAT I WAS EXPECTING CONFIDENTIAL

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IN DAMASCUS THAT SAME DAY AND AID/W EXPERT WHO WOULD BE CONSULTING WITH HIS GOVERNMENT ON PROCESSING OF THE SYRIAN CANDIDATES FOR THESE SCHOLARSHIPS.

5. THE FONMIN REPLIED THAT THE DECISION TO DECLINE OUR SCHOLARSHIPS HAD BEEN TAKEN "BY THE GOVERNMENT" WHICH HAD INSTRUCTED THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO SUSPEND FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON THIS ISSUE. SAID I HOPED MATTER

COULD YET BE RECONSIDERED GIVEN CLARIFICATION I HAD FURNISHED.

6. COMMENT: SINCE PRINCIPAL SYRIAN PROPONENT OF US SCHOLARSHIPS WAS KHADDAM'S COUNTERPART, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS HAYDAY, I WILL REVIEW SITUATION WITH HIM BEFORE ACCEPTING KHADDAM'S STATEMENT AT FACE VALUE THAT SARG HAS OFFICIALLY DECIDED AGAINST THIS ASPECT OUR AID PROGRAM. WILL AVOID ANY ACTION WHICH WILL EITHER EMBARRASS AMBASSADOR STERNER WITH UAEG OR COMPLICATE OUR OWN ONGOING DISCUSSIONS WITH SARG ON OTHER ASPECTS OUR AID PLANNING. SYRIANS HAVE TAKEN AS AN AFFRONT TO THEIR PRIDE FACT THE US ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS WITH ANOTHER ARAB COUNTRY SOLICITING FUNDS FOR BILATERAL SYRIAN-AMERICAN PROGRAMS WITHOUT INITIALLY CLEARING IDEA WITH SYRIANS. (WOULD NOTE SEVERAL OF KHADDAM'S CABINET COLLEAGUES IN PAST MONTHS HAVE ASKED US TO SOLICIT INTEREST OF OIL STATES IN SYRIAN PROJECTS.) WOULD NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT SEVERAL OF OUR CULTURAL/ EDUCATIONAL OVERTURES HAVE RUN INTO INEXPLICABLE DIFFICULTIES HERE. SARG HAS BEEN "STUDYING" OUR PROPOSED TEXT FOR SYRIAN-US CULTURAL AGREEMENT FOR FOUR MONTHS NOW. SYRIANS HAVE REJECTED SPECIFIC EXCHANGE PROPOSALS SUCH AS CLEVELAND PROGRAM AND OUR OFFER OF TENNIS COACH. IF SOME OF OUR PROPOSALS MAY HAVE FOUNDERED DUE TO SARG BUREAUCRATIC INEFFICIENCY, WE CANNOT RULE OUT PRESENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF INDIVIDUALS THROUGHOUT THIS GOVERNMENT WHO WOULD HAPPILY SABOTAGE DEVELOPMENT US-SYRIAN RELATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL-CULTURAL AREA.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: CONCURRENCE IN FOLLOWING SCENARIO. PLAN SEND NOTE TO FOREIGN MINISTRY FEBRUARY 1 SUMMING UP STUDIES AND MEETINGS OF AID/W TEAM WHICH CONCLUDES ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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SESSIONS HERE JANUARY 30. IN COURSE THIS REVIEW OF PROPOSALS NOW BEFORE CONGRESS, WILL TOUCH ON SCHOLARSHIPS. WILL EMPHASIZE, WITHOUT CITING ABU DHABI, THESE WERE TO BE ENTIRELY USG FUNDED. WILL PROPOSE THAT IF SARG DOES NOT WISH UTILIZE THESE IMMEDIATELY FOR PURPOSE ORIGINALLY DISCUSSED THAT A PORTION THESE FUNDS BE DEVOTED TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE PREPARATION OF AID-SPONSORED SYRIAN DOCTORAL CANDIDATES FOR EVENTUAL GRADUATE STUDIES. WILL NOTE THAT RECENT TESTING OF SELECTED GROUP SHOWED MAJORITY WILL NEED SEVERAL MONTHS INTENSIVE COURSE TO PREPARE FOR UNIVERSITY LEVEL WORK. WILL PROPOSE VENUE THIS TRAINING BE STATESIDE. ADVISE ASAP. MURPHY

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